Maria Edgeworth's narrative strategy in four successive Irish novels : Is her view of the Anglo-Irish landlord idealised or reconciled?[1)]

Yoko Fujisawa

1. Introduction: seriality of her Irish novels

In Maria Edgeworth's four Irish novels, we are shown the quite eccentric manners of Anglo-Irish landlords, and their corrupt management of their land and tenants is critically portrayed. For example, in *Castle Rackrent* (1800), the first and most celebrated of her four published Irish novels, successive, irresponsible Rackrent landlords are fully denounced for their lavish expenditures, excessive drinking and constantly idle lifestyle, while showing no interest in land management, which they left to their agents, and choosing to ignore their tenants' hard labour under the high rents unreasonably imposed on them. A fatal lack of the qualities requisite in a rational landlord results in the ultimate destruction of the family and its consequent takeover by a usurper from the growing middle class. Considering the political and economic situation of late 18th and early 19th century Irish society, a novel that reveals the bare truth of the tense relationship between the landed gentry and peasant-tenants, and which denounces the former for their unscrupulousness and ends with their downfall, could be regarded as quite problematic, particularly when the Act

of Union — the institutional union of England and Ireland in 1801 — was about to be enforced[2]. However, we must carefully look at the fact that the image of the landlords, who are depicted so critically in *Castle Rackrent*, is skilfully modified in Edgeworth's later Irish novels, *Ennui* (1809), *The Absentee* (1812), and *Ormond* (1817), which were published after the Union. In these three novels, Edgeworth seems to present ideal landlords who are quite different from the Rackrents. This may lead us to the supposition that her four Irish novels, even though we traditionally criticise each of them separately and regard *Castle Rackrent* as her masterpiece, taking little notice of the other three minor works, are actually a 'serial' story in four installments and have a motific continuity, which formulate her final position on the Anglo-Irish landed class before and after the Act of Union.

In this paper, I would like to consider Maria Edgeworth's representation of landlords and how it was gradually modified in these four successive novels, from *Castle Rackrent* to *Ormond*. Noteworthy is the intriguing transition of the narrative viewpoint in these successive works from the first-person narrative of Thady — a lower peasant-class servant in *Castle Rackrent* — to that of Lord Glenthorn of the ascendant landed class in *Ennui*, and then on to omniscient narrators in both *The Absentee* and *Ormond*. In this process of changing narrative viewpoint, we see Edgeworth's strategy of creating a complicated view and defending the situation of her own class at an important historical and political juncture of Anglo-Irish society[3].

2. *Castle Rackrent*: a reliable or unreliable narrative?

First-person narrative is adopted in *Castle Rackrent* in order to depict the

landlords' way of life, as is clearly explained in the preface to the novel:

> ... the public often judiciously countenance those, who... simply pour forth anecdotes and retail conversations, with all the minute prolixity of a gossip in a country town. (Edgeworth 1999: Vol. 1, 6)

Thady, an illiterate old servant, who is partial to the Rakrents, is able to frankly and unhesitatingly tell anecdotes about his master. His simple but vivid words, expressed in his native Irish dialect, exhibit both his natural emotion and his reliability, which has 'fair claims to the public favour and attention' (6). An example can be found in the passage below, which is about his third master, Sir Murtagh:

> Out of forty-nine suits which he [Sir Murtagh] had, he never lost one but seventeen ; the rest he gained with costs, double costs, treble costs sometimes ; but even that did not pay...but he was a very learned man in the law, and I know nothing of the matter, except having a great regard for the family.... (13)

As the first sentence shows, Thady insists that it is marvellous that Sir Murtagh loses only seventeen cases out of forty-nine, but then, while outwardly showing his unshakable loyalty to his master, he reveals the hidden fact that Sir Murtagh wins thirty-two cases with a secret fund. Such rhetoric is indeed an example of the famous 'Irish bull' — Irish phrases, speeches and humorous blunders[4]. Furthermore, in this case, the Irish bull contains some irony in the sense that Sir Murtagh devotes himself to lawsuits not for the sake of the public but for his own, and the very money he squanders comes from the rent imposed by him upon his tenants.

Nevertheless, as Edgeworth herself states in *Essay on Irish Bulls* (1802), such rhetoric is usually treated lightly among the Irish. However evil the hidden fact seems to be, it is regarded as a kind of humorous blunder, not as a harsh accusation:

> The Irish were the first to laugh at the caricature of their ancient foibles, and it was generally taken merely as good-humoured raillery, not as insulting satire. (Edgeworth 1999: Vol. 1, 151)

Let us now return to the function of Thady's first-person narrative. It is well known that recent critics have offered a more radical interpretation of Thady's character, for example, James Newcomer's view which throws new light on Thady's role in the family's destruction, and Tom Dunne's brilliant post-colonialist view of Thady's narrative style. Both critics place special attention on the ending of the story, wherein the Rackrents are taken over by Jason, the cunning agent of the family, and the family history ends with the death of the fourth Sir Condy. Jason, who belongs to the peasant class and has of necessity been sharp and shrewd since early childhood, rears his head and ingratiates himself with his predecessor. He capitalises on Sir Condy's incompetence in land management, and then succeeds in manipulating the family property. The incredible fact that Jason is Thady's son leads Newcomer and other modern critics to regard Thady as standing by his son's ascent from the beginning. Thady's narrative then, in the eyes of recent critics, is not so much Irish bull as it is the superficial flattery of a rebel who has a secret intention; in other words, it is a kind of 'unreliable narrator'.

A related argument concerns the novel's structural device. This novel uses a form that poses Thady as the narrator, but it also poses the author,

Edgeworth herself, as the Editor, who appears thrice—in the Preface, the Postscript, and the Glossary. Therefore, most recent critics believe that, even though Thady dominates the novel as a first-person narrator, the Editor in turn dominates Thady's narrative (the native Irish voice) with the Anglicised viewpoint (the colonisers voice) and controls the dangerous colonial context. Such an interpretation makes it possible to examine why Edgeworth caricatures the Anglo-Irish landlords, her very own class, and even ends the novel with their downfall. This is a quite interesting argument and is still a matter of controversy among critics. However, this is not the point in question in this paper. I would rather like to pay special attention to the fact that in *Ennui*, her subsequent Irish novel, landlords are presented quite differently than are the Rackrents.

3. *Ennui*: the 'playful takeover of an identity'

The narrator of *Ennui*—a story of landlords published in 1809—is the Anglo-Irish landed gentleman, Lord Glenthorn. Unlike the irresponsible landlords of the Rackrents, he is represented far more favourably, because he has enough discretion to reflect the evil of his own class and tries to reform it by himself. According to Joanne Altieri, such a shift of the narrative viewpoint from one class to another is 'a drop from *Rackrent*'s well-manipulated first person rhetoric and robust Irish vernacular into the smooth, flaccid banalities of the polite popular novel' (Altieri 1987 : 97). Compared to Thady's narrative, which is saturated with the Irish vernacular and Irish bull, Lord Glenthorn's narrative is indeed too sophisticated, and therefore, a little bit dull and meagre. However, what is important here is that Lord Glenthorn's narrative is full of attitudes that, for a landlord, are reasonable and responsible:

> By this time my castle-yard was filled with a crowd of great-coated suitors...they, with a patience passing the patience of courtiers, waited, hour after hour, the live-long day, for their turn, or their chance, of an audience. I had promised myself the pleasure of viewing my castle this day, and of taking a ride through my grounds...I was now to live...only for the service of my subjects...it seemed evident that they could not exist without me. (Edgeworth 1999: Vol. 1, 193)

This quotation is from the scene in which Lord Glenthorn, after recovering from a nervous condition often recognised as an occupational disease of the wealthy class in the 18th century—the melancholia or ennui—returns from fashionable London to Ireland and finds that the estate of his parents has been neglected for a long time. It is evident that Lord Glenthorn is a landlord quite different from the Rackrents, who only pursue their own happiness and have no sympathy for the peasants' plight. Lord Glenthorn tries to devote himself to the peasants' happiness rather than his own. Thus, the image of landlords as irresponsible and dissipate, created by the lower-class peasant Thady, is brilliantly modified in Glenthorn's narrative, wherein Lord Glenthorn is an ideal man who discovers his raison d'être as a landlord and becomes aware of his duty and responsibility.

The reason for this modification may be related to the important political issue of the time—the Act of Union with England of 1801. Even though Edgeworth does not explicitly express her political views in her writing, she is reported to have supported the Union because she believed it would advance the Irish economy ; however, she also believed that both countries should unite on an even ground with bilateral profit and mutual interest. 'The Limerick Gloves', a short story published in 1799, provides

such a view and can be read as an allegory of the Union, wherein characters from two conflicting families, Mr. Hill, an English tanner, and Brian O'Neill, an Irish glove merchant, are reconciled in the end. Mr. Hill is prejudiced against Irish people, unreasonably blames Brian for the disappearance of their dog and suspects him of intending to blow up the cathedral in the town. Nevertheless, he apologises for having prejudice in saying that '...I have no manner of doubt, as I said before, that an Irishman born may be as good, almost, as an Englishman born' (Edgeworth 1969 : Vol. II, 125). Further, when it becomes clear that O'Neill is perfectly innocent, the two families become 'useful friends to each other' (128) and in the end, O'Neill marries Phoebe, a daughter of Mr. Hill. They are sure that 'nothing could be more for their mutual advantage than to live in union' (128). This short story is, in a sense, too simple to be read as political writing ; however, it certainly provides one of Edgeworth's consistent beliefs in later Irish novels; to claim 'equality' with England is far more important than to claim the 'uniqueness' of Ireland for gaining equality and union, and to bring about mutual benefit. If we suppose that this belief of 'equality' is also applied to Edgeworth's way of representing landlords, it may account for why she tries to strike a balance between the viewpoints of both sides ; that is, after offering Thady's humorous and sometimes ironic view of Anglo-Irish landlords, Edgeworth has Lord Glenthorn, a landlord himself, speak about what the ideal landlord should be — someone with a rational and progressive mind — in a manner totally different from Thady's natural and unsophisticated way of speech. It is undeniable that Lord Glenthorn is far more able than Thady to win the sympathies of readers based in England.

We noted earlier that Thady has been regarded as quite radical since Newcomer's brilliant research ; however, in the 1990s, Jacqueline Genet,

Vera Kreilkamp and Julian Moynahan advanced a theory that Thady is in fact a servant in the 'Big House.'[5] This interpretation corroborates what Edgeworth herself recollects in her memoir that Thady's origin can be traced to John Langan, an old steward to the Edgeworthtown House, whom she could mimic perfectly, from his accents and phrases to his gestures. Furthermore, this fact offers an opportunity to throw new light on the 'Big House novel' as a literary genre. Traditionally, *Castle Rackrent* is acknowledged as a pioneer of regional novels, and many people know that Walter Scott confessed, in the postscript to his *Waverly* (1814), that he owed his Scottish portraits to Edgeworth's Irish one[6]. However, quite recently, the view is gaining ground among critics that *Castle Rackrent* is rather a pioneer of the 'Big House novel' than of the regional novel. The Big House novel is concerned with the Anglo-Irish landed class and their estates, as well as their way of life. Indeed, *Castle Rackrent* can be read as a forerunner of later Anglo-Irish Big House novels such as Elizabeth Bowen's *The Last September* and Somerville & Ross's *The Big House of Inver*, which all portray a kind of feudal past, where harmony reigned, and which are frequently regarded as nostalgic or retrospective. Following this critical tendency, Moynahan, in her 1995 article, observes that Edgeworth, as an inhabitant of the Edgeworthtown House, transcends class differences and seems to identify with a poor servant in the house. This is because, according to Moynahan, she wants to satisfy her curiosity about her dotard but tempting old steward John Langan, the spit and image of Thady, with wrinkled face and shabby cloak, who was her only friend, and a close one, in the very restricted life of Edgeworthtown House. Moynahan observes very correctly that it is 'the preservation of self-identity by the playful takeover of an identity that is opposite and opposed' (Moynahan 1995: 22). It is true that Edgeworth, disguised as old Thady, indirectly reveals the

scandalous aspects of landlords ; however, by giving narrative authority to Thady, she herself could be absolved of all denunciations of the evil of landlordism and of thus being disloyal to her own class.

In the ending of *Ennui*, we can also recognise such a 'playful takeover of an identity', a fusion of opposite classes, even though the situation is different. As the story draws to a close, Lord Glenthorn discovers that he is not the real Earl of Glenthorn but the son of the Irish nurse Ellinor. His wealth, title and estate are transferred to the rightful earl, Christy O'Donoghoe, who has been brought up as Ellinor's son. Glenthorn thus rapidly descends from the upper class to the lower peasant class. However, this fairylike episode has a further unexpected twist. Lord Glenthorn, now a peasant son, studies hard to enter the bar and makes rapid rise with his energies and talents, while the real Lord Glenthorn fails to manage the estate because of his lack of education. The former Lord Glenthorn, then, marries Cecilia Delamere, an heiress-at-law ; that is, he becomes—from Earl of Glenthorn through Christy O'Dooghoe — Glenthorn Delamere. Such a plot has hitherto been criticised as too abrupt and eccentric ; however, if we apply 'the playful takeover of an identity' to this episode, we can interpret it as meaning that Edgeworth is trying to make Lord Glenthorn see his situation from the lower-class peasant viewpoint in order to realise by direct experience the arrogance of the ascendant ruling class, something of which he could never be aware by himself.

We are now able to see that Thady and Lord Glenthorn, the narrators in *Castle Rackrent* and *Ennui*, respectively, are not worthy spokespersons for their respective classes. Because both of them enjoy a 'playful takeover of an identity', they seem to be too defective in consistency and seriousness to be seen as examples of their class. Viewed in this light, it can be observed that these two novels do not necessarily represent landlordism as a whole.

The most likely explanation of this is that these are merely fairy and morality tales, which acknowledges the biographical fact that Edgeworth's leading motive for writing *Castle Rackrent* was simply to please her family and not necessarily to be published, and in fact, *Ennui* has as its subtitle 'Moral Tale'. This fact also supports her allegedly modest characteristic of never flattering herself about her talent as a professional writer, even after *Castle Rackrent* won great popularity. Bearing all this in mind, when considering the character of her father Richard Lovell Edgeworth and his famous career, it is quite conceivable that she had an interest in social issues like landlordism. Richard Lovell was an improving landlord, which was uncommon at that time when absenteeism was so widespread in Ireland. He joined in the Lunar Circle, which was a group of practical and empirical minds and indulged in mechanics and engineering, building roads and canals and making carriages and other forms of transport on his estate. Moreover, he was a member of the last Irish House of Commons and the Royal Irish Academy, supporting Catholic emancipation. He was indeed famous for his activity in many fields; however, what he did as a landlord is most eminent. He devised a new system of fines to stop the subdivision of land—a practice where larger tenants sublet to smaller ones. He also abolished duty work and duty fowl to reduce the tenant's burdens. In addition, he granted something that amounted to tenants' rights to those who were very industrious and reformed the renting system. Thus, he became a model landlord to whom his loving daughter Maria showed her respect and whom she served as an able secretary.

4. *The Absentee*: legitimatisation of landlordism

On the other hand, in *The Absentee* and *Ormond*, Edgeworth does not limit

the narrative viewpoint to either side of the class divide, but assigns it to omniscient narrators, which seems to be her mechanism for dealing unaffectedly, sincerely, and from a broader objective perspective with landlordism as a social system. In particular, in *The Absentee*, published in 1812, her awareness of the problem is reflected directly in the title. In Ireland, at that point in time, William Pitt failed to deliver his promise of carrying out Catholic emancipation, and therefore, landlords who ignored the rights of Catholic peasants and abandoned their responsibilities aggravated the Catholic problem. For Edgeworth, the root of all evil lies in the landlords' absenteeism, which permitted most landlords to enjoy their lives while experiencing the contrast between social life in Dublin and London and leaving their Irish estates to deteriorate. Thus, we can see in *The Absentee* that she encourages the ideal Anglo-Irish landlord who always resides in Ireland, knows his own estates well, visits as many peasant-tenants as possible and educates them. That is, she does not try to correct the evil inherent in the system itself, but only questions the individual qualities of a landlord. In doing so, she must have had her father in mind as a model.

In the early part of *The Absentee*, the character or the quality of the hero, Lord Colambre, is depicted from an omniscient viewpoint as follows:

> The sobriety of English good sense mixed most advantageously with Irish vivacity: English prudence governed, but did not extinguish, his [Colambre's] Irish enthusiasm. (Edgeworth 1999: Vol. 5, 9)

Then Lord Colambre gains many experiences, and in the latter part of the novel, his anticipated future is explained:

> ... the reasonable expectation that he will support through life the

> promise of his early character; that his patriotic views will extend with his power to carry wishes into action ; that his attachment to his warm-hearted countrymen will still increase upon farther acquaintance; and that he will long diffuse happiness through the wide circle, which is peculiarly subject to the influence and example of a great resident Irish proprietor. (199)

In these passages, Lord Colambre is depicted by the omniscient narrator as having all the best qualities of a lawful master ; however, it should be emphasised that the novel ends with a letter from Larry Brady (an Irish postilion of Lord Colambre), in which the voice of the omniscient narrator strangely covers its tracks. Why does Edgeworth abruptly give the narrative authority, though it is in a letter, to someone of the lower peasant class? In his letter to his brother Pat, Larry speaks frankly in the vernacular, and, hoping that the management of estate will improve, earnestly welcomes Lord Colambre as well as his parents, the Clonbronys, who return to their estate in Ireland from England:

> ... there was surprising great joy through the whole country ; not surprising, either, but just what you might, knowing him, *ra*sonably expect... They say, he is a very good gantleman... and takes no duty fowl... and all the men, women and children, in the town and country, far and near, gathered round it shouting and dancing like mad!... The master's come home, long life to him! (200)

We might feel that what Larry envisages here is a world of landlordism that is too idealistic and utopian to be ever put into practice. The introduction of this letter thus seems merely to be Edgeworth's strategy of legitimising

landlordism from the perspective of the lower classes. In other words, having Larry admit the hierarchy of the landed class versus peasant class in his own voice, she wisely and carefully defends herself in advance against a supposed assault from the lower class.

5. *Ormond*: understanding and compromise

Further, in *Ormond* (1817), her last Irish novel, Edgeworth's optimistic idealism is a little relieved. Though the novel also has an Edgeworthian, idealised landlord, Sir Herbert Annaly, he is more modest and reserved and tries to compromise with reality. Similar to Richard Lovell Edgeworth, he is a rational and enlightened Anglo-Irish man with responsibilities, and rules his tenants in a just manner, dealing with them neither as slaves nor subjects but as rational beings like himself. The hero of the novel, Ormond, adores him and tries to follow his example. What has to be noted here, then, is the way Annaly legitimises himself as a landlord. In order to get legitimatisation from the peasant-tenants, he, as a landlord, not only understands and accepts the tenants' virtues, but also moves toward becoming closer to them:

> He [Sir Herbert Annaly] spoke sense to them [his tenants] ; and he mixed that sense with wit and humour, in the proportion necessary to make it palatable to an Irishman. (Edgeworth 1999 : Vol. 8, 162)

Furthermore, it is noteworthy, at the end of the novel, that the orphaned Ormond faces the choice of an inheritance between two guardians, Sir Ulick O'Shane and Corneilius O'Shane. Sir Ulick O'Shane of Castle Hermitage is an Anglicised Irishman, having converted to Protestantism. As a member of Irish Parliament, he is a political jobber. Similar to the Rackrents, he rules

his tenants by threat. Corneilius O'Shane of Black Islands, Sir Ulick's cousin, is an old Irish Catholic with generosity and a warm heart, ignoring the present political climate and living in a traditional manner. He is a self-sufficient, self-reliant and self-contained man, and is called 'King Corny' by the peasants, who regard him with trust and warmth. Ormond is aware that Castle Hermitage is the finest estate and the best bargain ; however, recollecting the tenderness of his generous benefactor in the Black Islands, he ultimately chooses the latter, though the estate is a little old-fashioned. He chooses thus because he is reminded of the warmth of the tenants, who in turn accept and warmly welcome Ormond as a 'prince' :

> They [the people of the Islands] considered prince Harry as the lawful representative of their dear king Corny... (234)

Here, we must draw attention to the different way of welcoming the landlord by the tenants, between that in *Ormond* and that of Larry in *The Absentee*. In *The Absentee*, the peasant-tenants welcome Lord Colambre on the assumption that management of the estate will be improved under its lawful master. However, as can be seen in the introduction to Larry's letter, it is Edgeworth's strategy to legitimate the system of landlordism and to bring the peasant-tenants under the ruling system. On the other hand, in *Ormond*, an understanding or a compromise between the ruler and the ruled is apparent. In other words, a progressive mind, which Ormond achieves on the model of Annaly's enlightened practice, and a warm heart, which he finally finds in the generosity of the peasants of Black Islands, grow into one. The reason that Ormond is welcomed by the peasant-tenants as a lawful landlord is that he promises not to disturb the primitive way of life to which they have been accustomed for a long time under their beloved

King Corny.

If we consider Edgeworth's four Irish novels as one 'serial' story with motific continuity, it is quite significant that Edgeworth, in her depiction of landlordism in the last of this series, offers partial approval of, and a generous concession to, the peasant class. This is where we notice difference in Edgeworth's strategies when employing omniscient narrators in *The Absentee* and *Ormond*. William Howard acutely suggests, in his 1979 article, that in *Ormond*, the peasant-tenants begin to speak for themselves, and surpass narrative authority and Edgeworth's own voice:

> Ormond's decision to settle in the Black Islands is greeted by the people and by Miss Edgeworth from antithetical motives... By the end of the novel they speak an independent mind, not one that is admired by the author, but one that she nevertheless recognizes as a fact of life. (Howard 1979: 337)

6. Conclusion: Edgeworth's anxiety

By the time Edgeworth published *Ormond*, she was uneasy about whether the ideal landlordism of *The Absentee* would be supported by her readers. Therefore, it seems reasonable to suppose that her fear of whether her optimistic perspective contradicted the harsh reality brought about a kind of mitigation of her idealism in her last Irish novel, *Ormond*. Her expression of such an anxiety leads naturally to the fact that she never takes up her pen and writes about Ireland after *Ormond*. The subsequent letter, addressed to her brother in 1834, is well known for showing her deep misgivings:

> It is impossible to draw Ireland as she now in a book of fiction —

> realities are too strong, party passions too violent to bear to see, or care to look at their faces in the looking-glass. (Butler 1972: 452)

The Act of Union was not successful, and Daniel O'Connel (1775–1847) appeared as a spokesman for Ireland, leading the Catholic Association in 1823 and helping to win Emancipation in 1829. The Union was not able to bring harmony and prosperity to Ireland as she had wished. Far from it, the divisions in the country became worse. It was only when O'Connel succeeded in establishing a Catholic-Irish identity, which made Edgeworth realise that reconciliation between landlords and tenants would not give rise to a prosperous Ireland and that her perspective was no more than a dream.

In this paper, I considered the image of the landlord in Maria Edgeworth's four Irish novels, published before and after the Act of Union, and found that the aggressiveness shown in *Castle Rackrent* is deliberately mitigated in the next novel, *Ennui*, and that the lack of, and separation from, reality evidenced in these two novels are confronted in *The Absentee* and *Ormond*. For Edgeworth, this involved a process of shifting the narrative viewpoint from the first-person narrator of the lower peasant class to that of the upper landed class, then to the omniscient narrator with an abrupt intervention, and finally to a trans-omniscient voice. It should also be noted that in writing the last novel, *Ormond*, her optimism seems to be reconciled with, or rather shattered, by the stern realities.

To conclude, I would like to introduce one more episode, wherein Edgeworth seems not to have entirely discarded her hope and sticks to her vision of landlordism:

> The cry against Irish landlords, which has been unjust, will [she insisted] be completely put down by the humanity and most active

> exertions of the landed proprietors during the distress in Ireland... I could name at least ten or twelve great landed proprietors who have this season and last year lost their lives from overexertion and from fever caught in attending their tenants and the poor. (Hurst 1969 : 166)

This is a letter written by Edgeworth herself a few years before she died in 1849, when the Great Famine hit Ireland. Despite this calamity, it is reported that she gave careful consideration to peasant victims and spared no pains to petition for support from America. Furthermore, as the letter above shows, she insisted on the generosity of many other landlords who did not grudge spending time on providing help for the Irish peasant. In light of this letter, it is conceivable that Edgeworth, though interrupting her career as an Irish novelist by this time, seems not to have actually taken a pessimistic view of the possibility of a reconciliation or compromise between the landed and the peasant classes.

Notes

1) Some parts of this paper have been modified from a paper presented at the 73rd General Meeting of the English Literary Society of Japan held at Gakushuin University on 21 May 2001.

2) Beginning in the 1780s, the struggle between Protestants and Catholics, which commenced in Ulster, increased its violence, and was stimulated by the French Revolution. In 1791, Theobald Wolf Tone (1763–1798) formed United Irishmen—a combination of radical Anglicans and northern Irish Dissenters—in Belfast. This was formed primarily to integrate Protestants and Catholics, but also to provide Catholics with the same civil rights as Protestants. Prime Minister William Pitt (1795–1806) felt the necessity of conciliation and pressured the Irish Parliament to pass the Catholic Relief Act of 1793. United Irishmen took advantage of it, threatening Anglo-Irish property with even greater violence. Although they expected the help of the French army, a French ship was unfortunately wrecked

off the coast of Ireland, and there ensued the famous uprising of 1798. United Irishmen was at first a movement founded in order to resolve the religious conflict; however, in the end, the uprising's hidden meaning became clear—the lower class's revolution against Ascendancy, which was, for Pitt, a great danger. However, after being spied upon, the uprising was put down by the British army in a few weeks, and almost all its leaders were arrested. Next came the Act of Union of 1800, which was enforced in 1801. Keeping in mind these historical facts, we may read *Castle Rackrent* as the history of the decline and fall of Anglo-Irish prosperity, wherein it is asserted that the decline was caused by their own failure and no one is to blame in particular.

3) Maria Edgeworth was herself born into a typical family of Anglo-Irish landlords. In tracing her family back to the 16th century, we find that two English brothers, her ancestors, came to Ireland, and in the early 17th century, one of them settled in an area of about 600 acres in County Longford, which was later called Edgeworthtown under James I's policy of settling Protestants of English descent on land that originally belonged to Irish Catholics.

4) Maria Edgeworth published, in collaboration with her father, *Essay on Irish Bulls*, in 1802.

5) The Big House is the Irish country house, the residence of Anglo-Irish landlords, usually dating from the 18th century and set in a landscape that was quite modest compared with that of the English country house. As for the tradition of the Big House novels, see Vera Kreilkamp's *The Anglo-Irish and the Big House*, and Jacqueline Genet's *The Big House in Ireland: Reality and Representation*.

6) Sir Walter Scott. *Waverly*. Rpt. New York : Dutton, 1969, p. 479. 'It has been my object to describe these persons, not by a caricatured and exaggerated use of the national dialect, but by their habits, manners, and feelings ; so as in some distant degree to emulate the admirable Irish portraits drawn by Miss Edgeworth...'

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